

## **FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** April 14, 2016

**Agenda Item:** Dome Mountain Wildlife Management Area Agricultural Five-Year Lease Renewal

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 Min

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### **Background**

FWP is proposing to renew a 5-year agricultural lease with the Kinkie Ranch on about 150 acres of the Dome Mountain WMA. The lessee will plant, cultivate, and irrigate alfalfa and grain hay and retain the first cutting. The lessee will use cultivation methods to discourage weed establishment and growth, including periodic renovation of the hayfield. After harvesting the first cutting, the lessee will continue to irrigate the 150 acres of cropland through September 30 or until water becomes unavailable. The regrowth will be left as forage for wildlife use during the winter. The benefit and purpose is primarily for elk and deer. The primary objective is to retain elk on the WMA to reduce adjacent private land conflicts during the winter and spring.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

In February 2016, FWP Region 3 issued a draft environmental assessment (EA) and solicited public comment for the proposed Dome Mountain WMA haying lease with the Kinkie Ranch. The Department received three comments. Two asked clarifying questions. The third comment was from the lessee recommending an adjustment to timing of operations during the period of time when the WMA is closed to the public, which is addressed in the Decision Notice.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

1. No action (no agricultural lease) alternative:
  - FWP would need to allocate resources to either continue farming or restore native habitat and manage weeds on the 150 acres.
  - Without irrigation farming, elk will likely utilize adjacent private land in larger numbers during the winter and spring time periods.
2. Proposed action (provide agricultural lease) alternative:
  - Improved winter forage conditions and availability for wildlife.
  - Provide a mutually beneficial agreement with a local private landowner.
  - Reduce elk usage of adjacent private property during the winter and spring.
  - FWP resources not required for maintaining and managing hay field.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends approval of the five-year agricultural lease on Dome Mountain WMA. The lease has maintained greater forage abundance for elk, allowing them make more substantial use of this portion of the WMA and reduce elk usage of adjacent private land.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move the Commission approve the five-year agricultural lease with the Kinkie Ranch on the Dome Mountain WMA.